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STATINTL

K's On-and-Off Policies Blamed in His Downfall

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It fell to Nikita Khrushchev to be the architect of the transition from Stalin to the post-Stalin era.

Stalin had left him an unenviable legacy: He destroyed the flower of the Party apparatus and the army officers corps; he undermined any sense of initiative and creativity among those who remained; through the development of a highly efficient and ruthless secret police network, he sowed fear and suspicion throughout the Soviet Party and population.

Furthermore, Stalin fashioned a rigidly centralized system which while stable was ill-adapted to the complexities of modern industrial society. He presided over an equally centralized Communist empire almost completely responsible to Soviet interests, which left no room for diversity.

Unsettling Influence

Stalin's heirs virtually all agreed that transformation of this system was necessary. Each of them might have sought to bring this about in different ways. As it happened, shrewd and capable as Khrushchev was, his style of leadership proved to be a highly unsettling influence in Soviet society.

In marked contrast to the oracular Stalin, Khrushchev was colorful, energetic, impetuous, and highly volatile. At a time in Soviet history when profound change was essential, Khrushchev's great strength was not only that he did not fear a break with the past but that he sought endlessly for new answers to persistent and often intractable problems.

But after a decade of Khrushchev's leadership, the modern and stable post-Stalin system so ardently desired by the Russian Party and populace alike is not within reach and the Communist empire is confused and disintegrating.

One suspects that the Party has had enough of Khrushchev's attempted revolution from above, his improvised solutions, his rapid succession of organizational changes, his shifts and starts. It is the yearning to put an end to all this and to regain some of the stability of earlier years that appears to lie at the root of Khrushchev's overthrow.

Some evidence for this conclusion can be seen in the first charges that the new Soviet leaders have brought against Khrushchev, charges that in domestic policy he drifted from one policy to another, made hasty decisions, often reached immature conclusions, and so on. There is much substance to these contentions.

Agriculture Sore Point

Even close students of Soviet affairs have in recent years been hard pressed to keep up with the sudden changes in Khrushchev's domestic economic policies and organizational schemes. The effect on the Soviet Party of such constant improvising was clearly unsettling.

A low-ranking member of the Soviet Party with whom I talked in Moscow last winter, and who was on no other points critical of the regime, told me Khrushchev's shifting agricultural policies has created much skepticism within the Party. One year, my informant said, Khrushchev would say the virgin lands were the key to agricultural production. Another year it would be corn and still another chemical fertilizer. He obviously did not have the answer, this man said, and everyone knew it.

Such rapid and perturbing changes have been typical of Khrushchev's volatile style of leadership and affected every facet of Soviet life. Thus, in 1957 Khrushchev said that the Supreme Council for the National Economy was the solution to Soviet economic problems; a few years later he instituted such a Supreme Council.

2 or 3 Reorganizations

The Party and state control commisions have undergone two or three reorganizations in the past few years and are now combined. In 1954 Khrushchev said the machine tractor stations in the countryside would be the basis for reconstruction or agriculture; in 1958 he abolished the stations altogether.

When regional economic councils were first established, Khrushchev set up 101 and cautioned that they

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should not be too large. A little later the number was reduced to 60 and thereby greatly increased in size. These regional economic councils were first responsible to Gosplan, the State Planning Commission, and somewhat later responsibility was divided between Gosplan and the newly created Republican Council.

The changes in authority, responsibility and even the title of Gosplan still have occurred so frequently since 1957 that even the close student of Soviet affairs has had difficulty in keeping up with them. Moreover, the most recent reorganization of the Party apparatus, dividing it into separate industrial and agricultural units, has greatly blurred the lines of authority within the Party, and between the Party and the various branches of the economy.

Confusion in Bloc

So far as the once highly centralized Communist empire is concerned, Khrushchev leaves it in confusion and disintegration. While the crisis of world communism, like the chaos on the Soviet domestic front, is in some measure the result of forces over which Khrushchev has no control, his impulsiveness contributed much to exacerbating this crisis. His sudden rapproachment with President Tito of Yugoslavia and his equally sudden revelations about Stalin's crimes helped create the ferment that led to the Hungarian and Polish revolutions in 1956.

His handling of the China problem was equally impetuous. In 1957 he signed a secret defense pact with China in which he promised to help them develop their nuclear program; two years later he abolished the pact. In 1960 he abruptly withdrew Soviet technicians from China after having launched a surprise attack on the Chinese at the Rumanian Party Congress.

After a lull in the polemics with China in 1961, he launched another surprise attack, on their Albanian proxy at the 22d Party Congress.

[illegible] tactics met with [illegible] disapproval [illegible] Communist [illegible], even among those parties that sympathized with the Russian ideological and strategic position. Perhaps more important, such tactics seem to have been based on a gross underestimation of the pride of the Chinese leaders and a questionable belief that blackmail tactics could force the Chinese back into line.

The Cuba Missile Crisis

Similar blackmail tactics were used unsuccessfully against the West in an effort to force a Western retreat from Berlin at a time when Soviet strategic power was inferior to that of the United States. The Cuban missile deal was perhaps the best example of the adventuristic and erratic style of Khrushchev's leadership in foreign affairs.

In sum, Khrushchev and his colleagues inherited from Stalin a system that urgently required change. But in seeking to bring about necessary changes, Khrushchev has not been guided by any far-reaching plan. He has proceeded in an erratic and bumptious manner and has thus helped create a highly unstable situation both in the Soviet Union and the Communist world as a whole.

His successors have apparently had enough of this state of affairs and it is probably a generally shared mood within the Party that has led to Khrushchev's downfall, rather than any single question of policy or procedure. But the legacy bequeathed by Khrushchev to his successors is not much more enviable than that which Khrushchev inherited from Stalin.

The stage now seems to be set for a new generation of technocrats and organization men like Brezhnev and Kosygin. Their major goal will be to introduce stability, efficiency and clear lines of authority to the complex Soviet system without turning the clock back towards Stalinism. This will not be an easy task.

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